

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Thomas & Betts Corp.

Arkansas Manufacturing Solutions

Thomas & Betts Gets Charged Up About Lean Manufacturing

Client Profile:

Thomas & Betts Corporation is a manufacturer of electrical conduit fittings and connectors. Thomas & Betts currently employs 460 people at its Jonesboro, Arkansas facility.

Situation:

Thomas & Betts (T&B) began a lean initiative a few years ago. In December 2001, the Jonesboro facility was chosen by T&B's corporate officials as the home of two product lines formerly produced in Ohio and Alabama, in large part because of the facility's lean initiative. With the addition of the two product lines, the Jonesboro facility needed to recruit new employees, and decided to implement a pre-employment training program. During the pre-employment program planning phase, T&B's human resources manager, James Couch, attended a Principles of Lean Manufacturing (Lean 101) course conducted by the Arkansas Manufacturing Extension Network (the Network), a NIST MEP network affiliate, at Arkansas State University Center for Economic Development at Jonesboro. Mr. Couch was impressed with the lean training model and the Network's lean competency. Based on his recommendation, T&B asked the Network to conduct its pre-employment lean training.

Solution:

The Network met with T&B to set up the pre-employment training program. During the planning stage, the team determined that in-house Lean 101 and Value Stream Mapping (VSM) training would benefit existing T&B employees as well as prospective new employees. Therefore, the Network conducted a Lean 101 seminar and a three-day VSM training and exercise event at T&B in April 2002.

In August and September, pre-employment training launched into full implementation. The Network provided four introductory lean sessions to T&B's pre-employment candidates. Topics included an introduction to lean philosophy and practice, the tools used to implement lean transformation projects, explanations of terms, and a discussion on the idea of team work and continuous improvement.

One hundred and eight potential T&B employees received training in basic lean manufacturing concepts. Now T&B employees enter the workforce prepared to participate in the overall goal of constantly improving the business. In addition, they are trained to assess work areas to identify opportunities to

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

implement lean principles, and have the skills necessary to jump right in and make changes happen.

Results:

Invested \$7,000 and over 600 worker-training hours to educate the workforce.

Reduced inventory.

Increased productivity and efficiency.

Expanded employee knowledge-base outside of functional areas.

Improved employee morale.

Improved utilization of space to produce a cleaner, more organized facility.

Testimonial:

“We feel that the Network's lean training gives each new employee an understanding of the objects--past, present, and future--that this facility must complete in a world economy. Lean concepts must become a basic ingredient in the attitudes and work ethics of all employees at our facility. Without this Lean 'mind set,' new employees will not have an understanding of the programs and their objectives at T&B.”

James Couch, Human Resources Manager